

Tagging along

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/14913404) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/14913404>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationships:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter , Will Graham & Hannibal Lecter
Character:	Will Graham
Additional Tags:	Missing Scene , Episode: s03e05 Contorno , Ravenstag , Yearning , Angst and Feels
Language:	English
Series:	Part 7 of A pendulum, swinging
Collections:	Will In The Woods , Will in the Woods
Stats:	Published: 2018-06-15 Words: 916 Chapters: 1/1

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by [Nalyra](#)

Summary

Just a little something for the #WillInTheWoods challenge.

Taking it literally :)

The drop takes much longer than reality forces on him, backwards, tumbling through the air.

The train twirls in and out of his vision, before the crack of his bones drags awareness back into his body, painfully and instant. Breath is forced out and does not return, the dumbfounded paralysis of his limbs suffocating, skin screaming in agony. The rattle of the train's wheels disappears, like a herd of galloping mammals, fleeing from the beast that set them off.

Time passes.

Eventually, the agony fades, leaving exhaustion in its wake. *Is this really worth it?*

A stark counterpoint to the Ravenstag's breath, tickling his nostrils. Another puff, carrying the scents of greenery and copper, decay and fruit, and something that is distinctly... *him*. Will blinks, eyes still unfocused on the rails. His hands contract slowly, nails scratching over the rough stones between the planks. *It would be peaceful, here, would it not?* Another huff of breath, carrying more of him, mixing with the smell of candles. Will raises his eyes to the ceiling of the Norman chapel, the priest raising his hand in benediction, touching his forehead. His eyes close. The mighty beast above him shakes itself, stepping closer. The impact of the snout pushing jars him out of their mind palace, *when did it become ours?*, forces adrenaline to reanimate his limbs.

He stumbles to his feet, eyes a bit wild, still unfocused, almost unwillingly accepting being only battered and bruised. But functioning.

The antlered head tilts and then turns, hooves clattering on the planks. Walking forward, following the train. *Click. Click. Click.*

Will's feet follow, taking up the slow rhythm.

Pine needles. Their smell permeates his senses, like a seductive fog, needed more with every other breath. The Ravenstag's feathers rustle, a whiff of aftershave mixing in. *Isn't it weird what exactly we remember?*

Will pushes some fern aside, feeling the tiny pearls of moisture clinging to his skin. Damp earth drops from his feet, the hooves' sounds dampened to soft thuds. *One more step, one more.*

Darkness descends. *Already?* It's soothing, like a velvety blanket, weighing Will's mind down. *When did I leave the tracks?* His stomach rumbles and he presses a hand to the trunk of a tree. The moss on it is prickly, feels like skin, under stubble. *Pressing into the neck, while red life splashes to the ground.* Will inhales, blinking rapidly, phantom agony drawing a line across his stomach, forming a wry smile. Something soft and feathery lands on his hand, frail wings beating gently. *Like a moth to a flame.* The Ravenstag puffs, shakes its head impatiently. Will raises his head, left eye a bit swollen, vision impaired still.

Wavering.

Why do I do this?

Will shakes his head slowly, sinking to his knees. His eyes close. The moth takes flight, flitting around his head and then disappears, the night time forest swallowing it up. Hooves

come to rest next to him, the mighty beast lowering to the ground with a massive thump, a huff of air that seems to envelop him, embrace him.

It does not offer warmth.

What does this offer me?

He exhales and then shifts, leaning against it, sitting on his haunches. Sedate pulses, pushing against the skin pressed into his side. *A heart, impossible to stop. But easily to wound.* Will raises his hand, threading his fingers through the fur, his fingers touching the feathers on the shoulder. Brilliantly dark, with hues of red, violet, green and blue shimmering in the pale moonlight, the antlers casting faded shadows over them both. *Are our stars the same?* It turns its head and looks back at Will, solemn, waiting. The eyes have a blackish red hue to them, something in them burning.

Intelligent.

Offering understanding.

It hurts. Will swallows and then lowers his head to its back, pushing his nose through the strands of fur. Under his touch the underlying skin warms, softens, yields. A tear trails down Will's face, drops down onto it, light fractured, a miniature rainbow for just a split second. *Beautiful.*

Will inhales, deeply, trying to breathe past the obstruction in his chest, past the yearning in his throat, the scream that wants to break free. The beast shifts beneath him, just a bit, and Will drapes himself across it, accepting, hands threading through the feathers. *You bled with me, there on the kitchen floor.* Will swallows. *When my old life bled out.* He sighs, one hand dropping to his stomach, pressing in. *When he marked me as his.* The Ravenstag rumbles beneath him, and Will lets himself fall into the sound, dreamless sleep descending. Peace. *This is what it would feel like.*

Green moss, under his skin. Rustling leaves, shifting when he turns. Birds, singing. Sun filters through the trees, rolling hills and fields visible just ahead. A church bell sounds and Will pushes himself up, inhaling deeply. *He is waiting.*

He traces the bark of a tree for a moment, picking off a tiny bit. He turns it around in his palm, dropping it into his pocket, next to the knife. *What will I reach for when I meet him again?* He leaves the forest, the low branches shifting into antlers for a moment, the Ravenstag hovering in the shadows. Will looks back for a moment, hesitating, red eyes watching him. He turns to the sun, the presence in his back lending strength, buffeting.

This isn't sustainable.

Will pushes forward, blinking rapidly.

No matter how beautiful it may be.

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